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Wednesday October 22, 2003



Web posted Wednesday, October 22, 2003

Beached ship sparks channel survey

Army Corps will look at lake bottom after another vessel gets lodged on a sand bar

By **LESA INGRAHAM**

Staff writer

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning to survey the channel between Lake Michigan and Lake Macatawa after two ships were beached on sand bars in separate incidents less than 72 hours apart.

The Wilfred Sykes became lodged on a small sand bar while trying to enter the Holland Harbor around 7 p.m. on Monday. Saturday afternoon, the Undaunted/Pere Marquette 41 beached itself deliberately along the northern breakwall while waiting for help to enter the harbor.

Tom O'Bryan, civil engineer with the Corps of Engineers in Grand Haven, said his office usually surveyed the Holland channel in the spring to map the lake bed.

"We survey before we dredge and then after we dredge in the spring. It's kind of unusual to do one this time of year," O'Bryan said.

To get a view of the lake bottom, crews will take a specially equipped boat across the area to determine the location of the hills and gullies.

Depending on weather and the calmness of the lake, the survey could be done this week. Once completed, O'Bryan said it could take up to two weeks to compile the data.



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Sand bars are caused by rough waters and storms, O'Bryan said, that can upset the channel bottom.

"Usually we don't see something like this until the fall storms come in and that's one of the main reasons we dredge the Holland harbor first," O'Bryan said.

The Wilfred Sykes was carrying 13,000 tons of coal intended for the James De Young power plant in Holland. The ship was stuck for about an hour Monday before dislodging itself, said Todd Stein, officer in charge at the Holland U.S. Coast Guard station.

The Indiana-based 678-foot bulk carrier was advised via radio by port officials in Chicago not to attempt to enter the harbor again.

While the ship was lodged on the strip of sand, Stein said the channel was temporarily closed. It reopened after the vessel had been moved.

"We sent out a notice to mariners that we were closing the channel and establishing a 200-foot safety zone around the vessel," Stein said.

Until the survey is completed, Stein said the Coast Guard was broadcasting a message to commercial vessels to alert them to potential problems at the entrance to the channel.



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